1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

equipment in large carrying-nets and bags; at such times the men march along unburdened, carrying in their hands only bow and arrows. This is, however, easily accounted for, as on the trek the men have always to be prepared to kill game for procuring food. If they, like the women, were hampered by heavy loads, they would practically have no chance at all of taking a ready arrow shot at game encountered on the march.

I never once saw grown women amusing themselves with any games or sports, whereas this is frequently the case with the men. The chief occupations of the latter consist of hunting, fishing, the gathering of wild honey and the manufacturing of various weapons and implements (see the above table of division of labour as between the sexes). The men give considerably less time to actual labour than the women, and to me it seemed as if the life of Choroti wives was hard and laborious, whilst that of the men, as a rule, was pretty light and easy-going.

Nevertheless, the men are by no means hard or cruel to their wives, and it appeared to me as if the women took it as a matter of course that they had to work for their husbands and children in the way they did, and, generally speaking, they seemed quite content with their lot in life. Indeed, I noticed many instances of real domestic happiness.

Parents bear great love to their children. These, when quite small, are carried by their mothers in a broad strip, or piece, of cloth in the way fig. 180 shows. The Choroti do not have many children; it is only seldom that the number of children exceeds four. According to Nordenskiöld, they are given names only when old enough to answer to them. The same author has noted down the following Choroti names, of which the first three are men's names, and the remainder women's names: Yóselianée (the killer of foxes), Hotenic (Mataco), Éstiähua (a gallinaceous bird), Hayku (not sweet), Kósoki (suffering from skin eruptions), Aséshnialo (women in plenty).[1]

Parental authority does not amount to much, and actual bringing up and discipline is entirely out of the question. In cases where parents attain so great an age that they become irksome to their children, it is not unknown for the latter to kill them. Nordenskiöld's interpreter, Flores, once witnessed a Choroti man burning an old and decrepit woman alive. Old men and women, who are suspected of working evil by witchcraft, are sometimes burned alive, and therefore it is possible that belief in the

[1] Nordenskiöld (13), p. 85.

1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

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Fig. 180. Husband and wife, with baby. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

[888 754 683] supernatural, of some kind or other, plays a leading part when children kill their aged parent.

622 Every village is ruled by a chief or headman. According to the observations of some investigators, these headmen do not nowadays possess any great power or authority, but among the Choroti whom I visited in 1901, the chief's authority was by no means inconsiderable. For example, it only needed my arranging with him that the Indians were to carry out a certain piece of work, and the work would be done. For the work performed by the Indians I paid the chief in goods, which he allotted among them as he himself thought fit, as it appeared. In war, each village [643] contingent is under the leadership of their headman. It was stated by the soldiers of Fort Crevaux that all Choroti used to be under a paramount chief, whose authority over all the other chiefs principally consisted in his being entitled to taking chief command in war. The office of village headman as a rule descends from father to son.

622 554 That certain Choroti chiefs used to be held in greater respect than others was made evident to us at a visit we made to a sugar plantation on our return journey to Salta. A large number of Choroti had just then

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

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anétsiăs vuh. exerting a certain social influence. Chieftainship however, among the Choroti is rather nominal than real; even the »great chief» is in fact destitute of power, although in relation to other tribes and to the whites he exercises certain representative functions. Thus when commissions from the sugar factories arrived in the Chaco to negotiate about the sending of Indian labourers to northern Argentine, they had to deal with the chiefs, who through the medium of interpreters gave them answers on behalf of their people. But even the »great chiefs» cannot compel anybody to work, nor can they interfere with the private affairs of the families, in which the father and the mother have full liberty of action. Still more imaginary is the power of the village chief, who is nothing but a *pater familias* enjoying a certain esteem. He cannot command anybody, but merely represents his village community in relation to outsiders, just as the »great chief» represents the whole sub-tribe.

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The dignity of chief is not hereditary among the Choroti, nor apparently among the Mataco. When the chief dies, the oldest family fathers of the community assemble under the big algaroba tree which serves as a club-house and elect a new chief, the election taking place in connection with a drinking-feast.

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Old men are generally held in great esteem, and the chiefs are generally, although not invariably, men of advanced age. Among the Choroti, old men are held in particular esteem for superstitious reasons, since they are believed to be changed, after death, into evil spirits. As we shall see later on in the chapter on the religion of the Indians, the spirits of the Choroti are believed to appear in the shape of old men. Since the natural magical power of the human body is increased with advancing age, it is natural that old people are feared, but the supernatural halo which surrounds them of course at the same time is apt to give them social influence. Above all their supposed connection with the spirits makes them qualified to exercise religious functions. Independent of any particular initiation, every old man is credited with the power of conjuring the spirits and is thus always more or less a sorcerer. If therefore we wish to speak of a social distinction among the Choroti, we may say that the sorcerers, called *ayĭeu*, are the only members of the Choroti society who in a certain sense form a class of their own or mark the beginnings of a social differentiation. Since, however, every old man is more or less expert in the act of magic and considered able to handle the rattle gourd (*pelĭte*) or the drum (*usyúk*), the *ayĭeu* of the Choroti cannot be called professional sorcerers in the strict sense of the word.

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2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 S17 Mataco S17
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in their magical dances and conjurations the Indians as a matter of fact most often deal with these particular evil spirits.

These are features common to the religious beliefs of all Indians of the Chaco, indeed they are found among all South American Indians. But even in the Chaco this general belief in spirits appears in somewhat different forms among different tribes. The *Choroti* fancy that the spirits, *möhsek*, in their external appearance have the shape of old, withered men (*kihilahs*). They are, in the imagination of the Indians, provided with wings, which enable them to move rapidly through the air. Owing to their bird-like appearance the spirits are also called *ahuena* (»the birds»). They are countless in number, mostly invisible, and as a general rule evilly disposed towards mankind. I never met an Indian who professed to have *seen* a *möhsek*, but nearly all say that they have *heard* their voices at night. One peculiarity of the demons of the Chaco Indians is that they only exist at night. As soon as darkness sets in the Choroti Indian fears mysterious dangers from the *möhsek*, who are then believed to draw near the villages in great numbers and even to enter into the huts, visiting the inhabitants with sickness and death. This is the reason why a traveller living with the Choroti can hear from some house nearly every night the low chant of some old man accompanied by the dull sound of the rattle gourd, *pelite*, with which he tries to conjure and keep off the supernatural pests. At daybreak however the spirits are supposed to leave for the forests and the plains — with a piping or whistling sound, the Indians explained to me, which they are very clever in imitating. For this purpose the Choroti use a special kind of round whistle which they generally wear hanging round the neck as an ornament. At their religious dances they produce, from time to time, shrill whistling sounds with these whistles, professedly with a view to conjuring the *möhsek*. The Indians believe that they can keep supernatural beings at bay by imitating them in their external appearance or their sounds.

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In the Chaco many weird sounds are heard at night which are apt to fill the natives with superstitious fear. The Choroti frequently told me about the »nightly whistling of the spirits» (*yap möhsek ahuäh*). The peculiar piping or whistling which is most often identified with the sound of the spirits is, I believe, produced by certain insects living on the stems or branches of the trees. The spirit of the tusca tree was specially mentioned to me, but this spirit is said to be a »good» being.

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The idea of the Choroti that the spirits have the shape of old men, has given rise to a peculiar and cruel custom. They do not allow their

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old men to die a natural death, but when they grow very weakly and sickly they kill them with an arrow-shot in the heart, whereupon they burn them with all their property instead of burying them, which among the Choroti is the general mode of disposing of the remains of the dead. The reason which they gave me for this custom was that if an old man is allowed to die a natural death he will be changed into an evil demon (*möhsek*), who will rage in the village and kill all the people. This, according to their idea, can be prevented by giving the old men a premature, violent death.[1]) In order to understand this custom we must, moreover, take into consideration that to the mind of these Indians *all* aged men are more or less versed in the magic art, *i. e.* are sorcerers, and the spirits of sorcerers are specially feared.

The fact that old men and sorcerers are believed to be transformed after death into evil *möhsek* seems to suggest that these spirits or demons are nothing but disembodied human souls, who have in the after-life been changed into supernatural and mostly evilly disposed beings. As a matter of fact, the death-spirit residing in the grave where a dead body has been buried is called *möhsek* by the Choroti. Like most other primitive peoples the Choroti fear the burial-places because they fear coming in contact with the spirits haunting these places. It seems therefore evident that at any rate the souls of certain persons are changed into *möhsek* after death. The word *möhsek* may therefore be best translated into 'ghost'. The Indians only use it of the disembodied souls or spirits of dead men, but not of the shadow-like »doubles» of a living person, for which they have no particular word. Even when speaking of a recently departed person they generally simply use the expression *yäl*, *i.e.* »the dead one». *Möhsek* particularly seems to have reference to the spirits of men who died long ago, and these spirits as a rule are more evilly disposed and more feared than the spirits of Indians recently departed.

The Choroti, like other Chaco Indians, do not deify inanimate objects of nature to the same extent as many other South American tribes. Yet

[1]) Nordenskiöld's categoric statement as to the practice of infanticide and parricide among the Choroti therefore is not correct. (»Der Mord beschränkt sich auf den Kinder- und Elternmord»; and: »Wenn ein Indianer seine alte blinde Mutter oder seinen verkrüppelten Vater tötet, so befreit er sie selbst von einem Leben das ihnen eine Last ist und sich selbst von einer Extramühe im Kampfe ums Dasein.» (*Indianerleben*, p. 38). As I have stated above, the killing of parents is limited to old men, and this custom must wholly be explained from the superstition of the Indians. Infanticide again is limited to the cases mentioned by me in a previous chapter.

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco
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shape of a horse [1] — an animal which is regarded with superstition by the Choroti — and will kill the »good spirit» of the inimical sorcerer. The latter being thus deprived of his assistant genius, will fall an easy victim to his assailant.

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The guardian spirit is not hereditary but is acquired individually in the course of life and to a certain degree through teaching. The older a person grows, the more power and influence he is believed, by the Tobas, to gain over his *peyák nõtta*; hence the medicine-men are generally men of advanced age. The same may be said of the *Choroti*, who regard every old man as being more or less a sorcerer and endowed with supernatural powers. Since the women are always physically and spiritually weaker than men, they have always more difficulty in obtaining guardian spirits. I only know of a special initiation for women, who dedicate themselves to the exercise of the magic art, in the case of the Choroti. A women who wants to become a sorcerer, I was told, must eat a raw chirimoya fruit (*Anona chirimolia?*). When ripe, the chirimoya is edible and good; but in an unripe condition it is said to be poisonous, and a person eating of it according to the belief of the Indians will die or fall ill. If however the woman, while she is eating the raw fruit, performs the ceremony *Kausimá* with the magical rattle staffs, she will escape harm and she will moreover in the future be able to conjure spirits with success. This idea is in fact typical of the initiation ceremonies of the Indians: the woman has been in contact with evil spirits but has been able to resist them, in consequence she has been rendered immune against them and acquired power over them which enables her to use them for her own ends in the future.

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Apart from the fact that the »good spirit» of the Choroti medicine-men is at least in some cases believed to appear in the form of a horse, the »good spirits» are in their external appearance like other spirits. The *Tobas* say that their *peyák nõtta* dwells in the heavens (*piyim*) from where he comes down to assist the medicine-man who invokes him. Similarly the Choroti say that their *möhsik eis*, when summond by the sorcerer comes down from the sky, but the »sky» (*põle*) is not to the Choroti a definite place like the *piyim* of the Tobas. *Piyim* has developed into a mythological concept: it signifies Paradise or the realm of the dead of the Toba Indians. When a Toba Indian dies, I was told,

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[1] Since the horse was introduced among the Chaco Indians by Europeans, this is not of course an original idea of the Choroti.

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913) 1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
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tion to the men shaking rattles, one or more Indians are beating drums and chanting. These noisy ceremonies are continued with short intervals during the whole night. When one party of Indians are tired and stop to rest for a moment, they are relieved by another party, since it is considered very important that there should be no interruption in the ceremonies; otherwise they would lose something of their effect. In the early morning the danger is believed to have passed; the fermentation has taken place, and the evil spirits have not been able to approach the drink and spoil it.

Although this negative object of the rites is particularly emphasized by the Indians, they also have a positive object which is indicated by the very expression »hurry on the fermentation». As we have already seen, the fruit of which the drink is made is believed to be animated by a spirit, and it is the same spirit that is active in the fermented, intoxicating beer. The rites described, while they are supposed to keep off evil spirits, are also intended to influence magically the plant-spirit itself and to bring it to its highest point of development, which is marked by the fermentation. This is partly effected through the chanting, the shaking of rattles, and the drumming, partly through the procedure of mixing the mashed fruit with saliva. The saliva really has the property of bringing about fermentation, and this phenomenon is explained by the superstitious Indian as due to the supernatural virtues which this secretion is believed to possess. Even the fact that only *old* women chew the fruit is probably not accidental. Old people have by nature a stronger magical power than the young and their saliva has therefore greater efficacy.

The Chaco Indians not only try to promote the growth of the fruits by shaking rattles and drumming, but also by *dancing*. Thus the Toba dance *Nahót dónnaran* is not only performed in cases of sickness, but also with a view to »hurrying on» the chanar fruit (*niapilák tákkai*). Once I witnessed such a ceremony. The chañar fruit — next to the algaroba the most important of the fruits growing in the Chaco forests — reaches maturity in the month of October and forms the staple food of the Indians during that month. The dance was performed in the following way. The fruit gathered in during the day was spread out on cloths or big hides on the ground outside the houses, where they are generally laid to dry. The dance took place at night. A young man began to dance alone, stamping alternately with his feet on the ground, without using any rattle and chanting at first in a low voice. Gradually his movements

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CHAPTER XVI.

Ceremonial fasting.

M 785 262 Fasting or restrictions in diet play an important part among the religious practices of the Chaco Indians. In most cases ceremonial fasting seems to be due to the belief that in eating man may come in contact with dangerous disease-bringing spirits which are in some way associated with the food. Since harmful spirits are supposed to have a special liking for certain kinds of food, these kinds of food are in some cases taboo to the Indians. The common belief that the spirits of the dead reincarnate themselves in various animals has in the first place given rise to all sorts of food restrictions, for the meat of such animals is generally, although not invariably, regarded as taboo.

M 262 The Indians of the Gran Chaco, dependent upon very restricted sources of subsistence, as a rule utilize everything that can possibly be used as food. Thus several animals are eaten which we do not regard as fit for food, and if a certain animal is despised, this is, as a rule due to superstitious ideas of one kind or another. The *Chorot* for instance C 262 among other things regard such animals as locusts, certain beetles, lizards, and a kind of rat as delicacies; of others the fox is considered edible, as also of birds the owl and a certain kind of vulture (called *carancho* in Spanish, *Polyborus vulgaris*). In regard to the fox, the owl, [588] and the vulture, however, there is the restriction that only *old* people can eat them, not young people and children, whom such food would do harm. In several cases I received from the younger Choroti men the explanation: "The old ones can eat the meat of this or that animal, not we". This means that such animals or birds as those just mentioned are in some way associated with evil spirits; the eating of the meat of these animals therefore would have disastrous consequences for young people and children who have less power of resistance against evil